



72.1992.1
Site of William Hayden English Home
Marker Review Report
7/13/2016

Marker Text

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English (1822-1896), politician, banker, and historian, served as secretary of 1850 Indiana Constitutional Convention, as Speaker of Indiana House, and in US House. Candidate for Vice President, 1880; President, Indiana Historical Society. Town of English Named After Him.

Report

While the text of the marker is largely accurate, there are some contextual details about English's life and work that should be addressed; specifically, his political career in the antebellum period and his involvement in the [contentious battle over the admission of Kansas to the union](#). The title of the marker, which indicates that this was his home, also needs clarification.

According to multiple census reports, William Hayden English was born on August 27, 1822. Numerous secondary sources, including Jacob Piatt Dunn's *Greater Indianapolis* and a November 1900 article in the *Indianian* by William Henry Smith, also confirm his birthdate. Early in his life, English received some formal education. According to a letter by E.D. McMaster from 1839, English received education in the "Preparatory and Scientific departments" of Hanover College. Additionally, he received accreditation to teach multiple subjects at common schools by examiners Samuel Rankin and John Addison. He would eventually leave school and pursue law in Scott County, where he passed the bar in 1840.¹

Before his work in the Indiana General Assembly and the United States Congress, one of English's earliest positions of public service was as principal clerk in Scott County. He was elected to this position in late 1843, according to an article in the Terre Haute-based *Wabash Carrier*.² He served as the Principal Secretary of the [Indiana Constitutional Convention of 1850](#). According to a letter from the Indiana Senate, English was considered for the position as early as April of 1850. An article in the *Indiana State Sentinel* later recorded his election to the position on October of 1850 on the third ballot by the legislature.³ It was reported in the September 1, 1852 issue of the *New Albany Campaign Tribune* that English received \$1024 in compensation for his role as Principal Secretary.⁴

While English served in the U.S. House of Representatives, the marker text mislead readers into thinking he served as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. This is incorrect. English served in the U.S. House 1853-1861 but never served as Speaker. He was the Speaker of the Indiana House of Representatives. He was first elected to the Indiana House of Representatives as a Democrat from Scott County in August of 1851. In December 1851, he gave one of his first major speeches on the House floor, calling for new tax assessments on "railroads, plank-roads, and canals," rather than calling on the citizenry to pay more. On March 8, 1852, after the resignation of [Speaker John Wesley Davis](#), English was elected Speaker of the Indiana House with an overwhelming majority of the vote (52 votes to his



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challenger's 15). He was only 29 years old, making him the one of the youngest Speakers in Indiana history. In his election speech, he praised the new Constitution and called for a full new legal code to be established under it. Additionally, he called for a "spirit of concession and compromise" and for his colleagues to "zealously apply himself to the completion of the great work intrusted [sic] to us by a generous constituency."⁵

In his valedictory address on June 15, 1852, Speaker English commented on the long and often arduous session of legislature, particularly due to the needs of the new Constitution. He also noted the House's level of legislative success; of the 560 bills introduced, 250 were enacted into law, which was more legislation passed than "by the five proceeding legislatures." In effect, the Indiana House of Representatives under Speaker English had consolidated state government and extended its purview to neglected regions of the state.⁶

English won his first election to the United States Congress in 1852, as a Representative of the 33rd District, which is confirmed by a letter from [Governor Joseph A. Wright](#) to English notifying his election. He would be reelected three times, in 1854, 1856, and 1858. During his tenure, English would be remembered for his "wise and patriotic course in Congress," notably his influential role in the [contentious admittance of Kansas to the union](#).⁷

English's time in Congress, much like the rest of his political career, can be seen as pragmatic. While he disliked slavery, he condemned abolitionists and believed in the notion of "[popular sovereignty](#)," which argued that the people of a state or territory should choose for themselves whether to have slavery.⁸ He stated his view in a speech in 1854:

Sir, I am a native of a free State [sic], and have no love for the institution of slavery. Aside from the moral question involved, I regard it as an injury to the State where it exists. . . .But sir, I never can forget that we are a confederacy of States, possessing equal rights, under our glorious Constitution. That if the people of Kentucky believe the institution of slavery would be conducive to their happiness, they have the same right to establish and maintain that we of Indiana have to reject it; and this doctrine is just as applicable to States hereafter to be admitted as to those already in the Union.⁹

During this session, Congress was debating a bill called the [Kansas-Nebraska Act](#), which would repeal the [Missouri Compromise](#) (also known as the Compromise of 1820) and allow for states and their citizens to decide whether they wanted to be admitted as a slave state or free state. English voted for the Kansas-Nebraska Act and it was later signed into law by President [Franklin Pierce](#) on May 30, 1854. Almost immediately, violence erupted between pro-slavery and anti-slavery advocates in Kansas, who could not agree on the issue of slavery in the state constitution.¹⁰

After his reelection in 1856, English, along with congressional colleague [Alexander Stephens](#), went to work on a compromise bill that would quell the violence and political unrest. This compromise,



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known as the [English Bill](#), allowed the citizens of Kansas to either accept or reject the pro-slavery [Lecompton Constitution](#). If they chose to join the Union as a slave state by referendum, they also had to give up federal land grants in the territory. The bill passed and the voters of Kansas accepted the land grants, thus rejecting the Lecompton Constitution. Upon the Bill's passage, English declared that, "The measure just passed ought to secure peace, and restore harmony among the different sections of the confederacy." The Kansas issue would be not resolved until its admission to the Union as a free state in 1861. While the English Bill had potential to save off conflict in Kansas, the harmony among the nation was short lived.¹¹

The growing tensions among pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions of the country were mounting, and English lamented this development in one of his final speeches to Congress. He chastised both the abolitionists and radical Republicans, who he believed had appealed to the "passions and prejudices of the northern people, for the sake of getting into office and accomplishing mere party ends. . . ." To English, the cause of this strife was the agitation of the slavery question and the solution would be to elect a Democrat President and ensure that the national discussion be reverted back to other issues of state. This did not happen; in the fall of 1860, voters chose Republican [Abraham Lincoln](#) and the first seven southern states seceded from the Union.¹²

By 1861, just as English was leaving Congress, the United States became engulfed in the [Civil War](#). While many within the national Democratic Party either defected to the Confederacy or took a tenuous position of support in the north, English was unequivocally for the Union. In an August 16, 1864 article in the *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, the Committee of the Second Congressional District, under the chairmanship of English, wrote a platform that supported the Union and decried the act of secession. However, it reserved criticism for President Lincoln, particularly with regards to supposed violations of freedom of speech. English's pragmatic, even-handed political gesture fell in line with many of his past political successes.¹³

The maker statement that English was a banker is correct. He was the President of the First National Bank of Indianapolis for 14 years, according to Indianapolis newspaper articles, city directories, and *Dunn's History of Indianapolis*. He established the bank in 1863, when he took advantage of the reestablished national banking system during the Civil War. According to historian Emma Lou Thornbrough, the First National Bank of Indianapolis became "the largest bank of Indianapolis, and one of the largest in the Middle West." He is also listed as a "banker" in the 1870 Census and as a "capitalist" in the 1880 Census.¹⁴

He was nominated by the Democratic Party in 1880 for Vice President. Articles in the *Indianapolis News* and the *Atlantic* noted that his chances for the Vice-Presidential nomination were quite good, especially if the candidate was the presumed front-runner [Samuel J. Tilden](#) of New York.¹⁵ Within days of the *News* piece, when asked if he was interested in the VP nomination, English claimed, "None whatever, for that or any other office."¹⁶



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Despite his protestations, English was nominated for the vice-presidency by the Democratic Party on June 24, 1880, after Tilden redrew his consideration for the presidential nomination and General [Winfield Scott Hancock](#) was nominated instead. In his acceptance letter, English wrote that he was “profoundly grateful for the honor conferred” and that his election with Hancock would be a triumph over the dominance of the Republican Party in the presidency. Their chances to win the White House were dashed when they lost to [James Garfield](#) and [Chester Arthur](#) in the general election.¹⁷

One detail that the marker does not include was his involvement in the creation of the [English Hotel and Opera House](#). Historians James Fisher and Clifton Phillips noted that English purchased land on the city circle in the 1840s, as a residence for himself and his family. In early 1880, during renovations on the circle (now [Indianapolis monument circle](#)), English announced that he would invest in the construction of a new Hotel and Opera House. His son, William E. English, became the proprietor and manager. It officially opened on September 27, 1880, and the first performance was Lawrence Barrett as Hamlet. Over its 68-year span, the English Opera House served as the “city’s leading theater and a favorite of Indianapolis Society,” according to historian Richard W. North. It would be in continual use until its closure and demolition in 1948.¹⁸

English served as the President of the [Indiana Historical Society](#), from 1886 until in his death ten years later. During his tenure, English wrote a two-volume history of the [Northwest Territory](#) and the life of [George Rogers Clark](#). It was published in 1896, shortly after his death. An 1889 article in the *Indianapolis Journal* noted his compiling of sources and his emerging methodology; a two-volume general history that would be divided at the 1851 revised State Constitution. By 1895, history of Indiana materialized into the history mentioned above, with English using documents from leaders involved, such as [Thomas Jefferson](#) and Clark himself. He also conducted interviews with other key figures of the revised Indiana Constitution. English’s historical research became the standard account of the Northwest Territory for those within the Historical Society and the general public for many years.¹⁹

William English died on February 7, 1896, as reported by the *Indianapolis Journal*. A February 9, Thousands came to see his body displayed in the Indiana State Capitol before he was buried in [Crown Hill Cemetery](#).²⁰ The town of English is named after the late politician. According to [historian H.H. Pleasant](#), the unincorporated town was originally named Hartford. It was changed to English in 1886 after the town was officially incorporated; named for William English due to his election in 1850 to the Indiana House of Representatives from that area.²¹ A newspaper article from the March 11, 1897 *Crawford County Democrat* also confirms his help in the founding of the town.²² While Pleasant notes that he was “elected to Congress,” he was in fact elected to the state legislature. He would be not elected to the US Congress until 1852. This was also after the 1880 Presidential Election when English was the Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate.

The marker’s claim that this is where his home was is correct, but needs context. English lived here with his family for many years, but as his time in public service and banking grew during the 1850s and 1860s, he would eventually move to Indianapolis, where he lived until his death in 1896. Primary



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research ties the English family to this land as early as 1855. According to an 1867 warrantee deed and an 1874 income tax receipt, William English's father, Elisha English, had purchased land near Lexington in Scott County. While these are official government documents, a mortgage receipt made in longhand from 1855 also places Elisha English in Lexington, Scott County but is not definitive. To push the date back farther, further research in the [William English Family Papers](#) at the Indiana Historical Society is needed but is outside the scope of this review.²³

¹ 1850 United States Federal Census, Scott County, Indiana, Roll M432_171, 173A, accessed [Ancestry.com](#); 1860 United States Federal Census, Scott County, Indiana, Roll M653_294, 964, accessed [Ancestry.com](#); 1870 United States Federal Census, Marion County, Indiana, Roll M593_340, 177B, accessed [Ancestry.com](#); 1880 United States Federal Census, Marion County, Indiana, Roll 295, 347B, accessed [Ancestry.com](#); William Henry Smith, "William Hayden English," *Indianian* 7, no. 5 (November 1900): 287-291, accessed [Google Books](#); Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis: The History, the Industries, the Institutions, and the People of a City of Homes*, Volume Two (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1910), 880-887, accessed [Google Books](#); E.D. McMaster, "The bearer hereof, Mr. Wm. H. English. . . .," Hanover College unofficial transcript, September 23, 1839, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society; Samuel Rankin and John Addison, "We the undersigned Subscribers Examiners of Common School Teachers. . . .," Common Schools Accreditation letter to William H. English, September 1839, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society; Smith, "William Hayden English," 287.

² W. Morris, "Wm. H. English, Esq.," Letter from the Indiana State Senate, April 9, 1850, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society; "Legislature," *Wabash Courier*, December 9, 1843, 3, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#). Unless specified, all newspapers are from Indiana.

³ "Afternoon Session," *Indiana State Sentinel*, October 10, 1850, 3, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#).

⁴ "How is This, Mr. English?," *New Albany Campaign Tribune*, September 1, 1852, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society.

⁵ "Election Returns," *The Prairie Chieftain*, August 21, 1851, 2, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "Remarks of Mr. English," *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, December 18, 1851, p, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "Remarks of Mr. English," *Indiana Statesman*, December 24, 1851, 2, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society; "The Legislature—Resignation of Speaker Davis, &c.," *The Indiana Statesman*, March 10, 1852, 2, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society; "House of Representatives," *Indianapolis Daily State Sentinel*, March 9, 1852, 3, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "Election of Speaker," *Terre Haute Journal*, March 12, 1852, 2, [Hoosier State Chronicles](#).

⁶ "Speaker's Valedictory Address," *Indianapolis Daily Tribune*, June 18, 1852, 2, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#).

⁷ Joseph A. Wright to William H. English, November 17, 1852, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society; "House of Representatives," *Daily Globe* (Washington, D.C.), December 4, 1854, 3, accessed [Newspaper Archive](#); *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, September 9, 1856, 3, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); William H. English, *Letter from William H. English In Response to a Nomination for Reelection to Congress, Tendered Him by the Democracy of the Second Congressional District* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Globe, 1956), 1-4, accessed Indiana State Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection; "Harrison County Democratic Convention," *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, June 10, 1858, 2, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "Democratic State Ticket," *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, September 27, 1858, 2, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#).



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⁸ William H. English, *Remarks of Mr. English, of Indiana* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1854), 4, accessed Indiana State Library, Manuscript Collection; William H. English, *Speech of Hon. W.H. English, of Indiana* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1856), 2, accessed Indiana State Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection.

⁹ William H. English, *Remarks of Mr. English, of Indiana*, 4.

¹⁰ "Kansas-Nebraska Act," *Primary Documents in American History*, accessed [Library of Congress](#).

¹¹ Kansas would not be officially admitted to the Union until after the southern states seceded. William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10-11, accessed [Google Books](#); James Buchanan and William H. English, *Remarks of the President of the United States and of Hon. Wm. H. English, of Indiana* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1858), 2, accessed Indiana State Library, Manuscript Collection

¹² William H. English, *The Political Crisis— The Danger and the Remedy: Speech of Hon. William H. English, of Indiana, in the House of Representatives, May 2, 1860* (Washington, D.C.: National Democratic Campaign Committee, 1860), 1-15, accessed [Internet Archive](#); Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era: 1850-1880* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1965), 85-100.

¹³ "Second Congressional District Democratic Convention," *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, August 16, 1864, 2, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#).

¹⁴ *Edwards' Annual Directory to the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business Firms, etc., etc. in the City of Indianapolis for 1865-6* (Indianapolis: Richard Edwards, 1866), 239, accessed [Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis Digital Collections](#); *Logan's Indianapolis Directory, Embracing an Alphabetical List of Citizens' Names, Gathered and Compiled Expressly for this Work* (Indianapolis: Logan & Co., 1867), 76, accessed [Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis Digital Collections](#); *Logan's Indianapolis Directory, Embracing an Alphabetical List of Citizens' Names, Gathered and Compiled Expressly for this Work* (Indianapolis: Logan & Co., 1868), 60, accessed [Fold3 by Ancestry](#); *Edwards' Annual Director to the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business Firms, etc., etc. in the City of Indianapolis for 1869* (Indianapolis: Charles Publishing Company, 1869), 12, accessed [Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis Digital Collections](#); S.E. Tilford and Co.'s Indianapolis City Directory, 1877 (Indianapolis: S.E. Tilford and Co., 1877), 214, accessed [Fold3 by Ancestry](#); "Book Keeper Wanted," *Indiana Daily Herald*, June 22, 1866, 1, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "To the Public: First National Bank of Indianapolis," *Indianapolis News*, September 25, 1873, 4, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "The Banks," *Indianapolis News*, August 16, 1883, 4, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "The Banks," *Indianapolis News*, August 22, 1883, 5, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, 437.

¹⁵ "Tilden and W.H. English for 1880," *Indianapolis News*, October 22, 1879, 1, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "The Democratic Presidential Nomination," *Atlantic Monthly* 45, no. 27 (May 1880): 662-669, accessed [Making of America](#).

¹⁶ "William H. English," *Indianapolis Daily News*, October 25, 1849, 4, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#).

¹⁷ "National Democratic Convention," *Greencastle Star*, June 26, 1880, 1, accessed Hoosier State Chronicles; *Our Presidential Candidates and Political Compendium* (Newark, New Jersey: F.C. Bliss and Company: 1880), 150, 157-161, 219-222, accessed [Google Books](#); Edward B. Dickinson, *Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, Held in Cincinnati, O., June 22d, 23d, and 24th, 1880* (Dayton, Ohio: Daily Journal, 1882), 131-168, accessed [Google Books](#); "The General Result," *Indianapolis News*, November 3, 1880, 1, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth: 1880-1920* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1968), 9-11, 16.



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¹⁸ Phillips, *Indiana in Transition, 580-581*; Richard W. North, "English Hotel and Opera House," in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows, eds. (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 546-547; James Fisher, *Historical Dictionary of American Theater: Beginnings* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), accessed [Google Books](#); "Security of English's Opera House," *Indianapolis News*, September 27, 1880, 1, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "English's New Opera House," *Indianapolis News*, September 27, 1880, 3, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); William E. English, "A History of Monument Circle, Showing its Many Changes During the Past Half Century," *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, July 8, 1923, 40, accessed [Newspapers.com](#).

¹⁹ Indiana Historical Society, *Minutes of the Society: 1886-1918* (Indianapolis: C. B. Pauley & Co., 1919), 463, accessed [Google Books](#); "Materials for a History," *Indianapolis Journal*, April 15, 1889, 8, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "The Story of Indiana," *Indianapolis News*, July 12, 1895, 4-6, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#).

²⁰ "Wm. H. English Dead," *Indianapolis Journal*, February 8, 1896, 1, 3-4, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); "Mr. English Burial," *Indianapolis Journal*, February 9, 1896, 8, accessed [Hoosier State Chronicles](#); Smith, "William Henry English," 287-291.

²¹ H.H. Pleasant, "Crawford County," *Indiana Magazine of History* 18, no. 3 (September 1922), 241, accessed [Indiana Magazine of History Online](#).

²² "Monument to English," *Crawford County Democrat*, March 11, 1897, 1, [Newspaper Archive](#).

²³ A. D. Hawkings, "Warrantee Deed, Short Form, W. W. Wigginton to E. English," Warrantee Deed, April 16, 1867, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society; Richard W. Montgomery, "Lexington T'p," Property Tax Receipt, November 23, 1874, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society; Benjamin Noakes, "Rec'd of E.G. English...," Longhand Mortgage Receipt, January 17, 1855, William Hayden English Family Papers, 1741-1928, Indiana Historical Society.